DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 481 644 RC 024 221

AUTHOR	Lopez, Gerardo R.
TITLE	Bringing the Mountain to Mohammed: Parent Involvement in Migrant-Impacted Schools.
PUB DATE	2004-00-00
NOTE	13p.; Chapter 10 in: Scholars in the Field: The Challenges of Migrant Education; see RC 024 211.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Family Needs; High Risk Students; *Migrant Education; *Outreach Programs; *Parent Participation; *Parent School Relationship; Well Being
IDENTIFIERS	Texas

ABSTRACT

Migrant students have a host of factors working against their chances of success in school. In the search for ways to counter these risk factors, educators have recognized the value of parent involvement. In addition to its effects on student learning and achievement, parent involvement also strengthens school accountability and gives historically marginalized communities a voice in school decision making. Little systematic research has focused specifically on best practices for involving migrant parents, and educators have had to rely on anecdotal evidence about creative approaches to involve this population. An ongoing research project focusing on successful Texas schools has found that effective initiatives in migrant parent involvement are not defined as a set of practices or activities for parents to do, but rather as a form of outreach. The schools in this study perceived themselves as active and proactive agents in reaching out to migrant parents and meeting their needs. Home visits and personal interactions between parents and school personnel made school personnel aware of the very basic survival needs of migrant families, which must be addressed as a first step in helping migrant students succeed. The schools also offered parent education that was an end in itself and improved migrant families' lives. In addition to removing logistical barriers to parents' attendance at school functions, the schools addressed social barriers by creating a more democratic and collaborative environment. (SV)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 481 644

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Carole Berry

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

CHAPTER 10

Bringing the Mountain to Mohammed: Parent Involvement in Migrant-Impacted Schools

BY GERARDO R. LÓPEZ

Prior to 1966, state and local governments, including local school boards, were reluctant to assist migrant workers and their families, who were seen as temporary farmhands, in the area for only a short time.[1] The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965—the cornerstone of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty—finally made migrant students an identifiable subject in the educational discourse. The thousands of children who traversed the continent with their caretakers in search of agricultural work prior to 1965 were, for all intents and purposes, invisible and considered unworthy of local, state, and federal assistance. Although the amount and types of services offered to migrant students have improved substantially since 1965, most migrant-impacted schools and districts still do not address adequately the multiple needs of migrant students and their families. In other words, schools have yet to solve the

[1]Deborah S. Dyson, *Utilizing Available Resources at the Local Level: Fact Sheet* (ERIC Digest) (Las Cruces, NM: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1983) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 286 702); and Philip Martin, *Migrant Farmworkers and Their Children* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1994) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 376 997).

RC 024 221

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

complex educational problems associated with mobility.[2]

As in the past, migrant students still face economic, cultural, and social discrimination, both within and outside the school environment. High poverty rates, numerous health- and work-related factors, increased rates of social and physical isolation, and a host of other factors (e.g., limited English proficiency, high turnover rates) place enhanced demands on schools to address the needs of this population.[3] Migrants have one of the highest drop-out rates of any student group in the country. Research suggests the vast majority of migrant children are at risk of dropping out due to poverty; the primacy of family survival, which often forces migrant children to work at an early age; and perpetual relocation from one school district to another.[4]

All in all, migrant children are at greater risk than other youth in the United States.[5] Many migrant families today still do not have taken-for-granted "necessities" such as running water, refrigerators, appli-

---

[2]Mary Henning-Stout, "¿Qué podemos hacer?: Roles for School Psychologists with Mexican and Latino Migrant Children and Families," *School Psychology Review* 25, no. 2 (1996): 152-64; William H. Metzler and Frederic Sargent, "Problems of Children, Youth, and Education Among Mid-Continent Migrants," *The Southwestern Social Science Quarterly* 43 (June 1962) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 012 632); Joseph O. Prewitt-Díaz, "The Factors That Affect the Educational Performance of Migrant Children," *Education* 111, no. 4 (1991): 483-86; Prewitt-Díaz, Robert T. Trotter, II, and Vidal A. Rivera, Jr, "The Effects of Migration on Children: An Ethnographic Study," *Education Digest* 55, no. 8 (April 1990): 26-29; Harriett D. Romo and Toni Falbo, *Latino High School Graduation: Defying the Odds* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996); David B. Schuler, "Effects of Family Mobility on Student Achievement," *ERS Spectrum* 8, no. 4 (fall 1990): 17-24; and Bruce C. Straits, "Residence, Migration, and School Progress," *Sociology of Education* 60, no. 1 (January 1987): 34-43.

[3]Judith LeBlanc Flores and Patricia Cahape Hammer, "Introduction," in *Children of La Frontera: Binational Efforts to Serve Mexican Migrant and Immigrant Students*, ed. Judith LeBlanc Flores (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1996) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 393 633); Al Wright, *Reauthorized Migrant Education Program: Old Themes and New* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1995) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 380 267); Roberto S. Guerra, "Work Experience and Career Education Programs for Migrant Children," *Sourcebook of Equal Educational Opportunity* 39 (1979): 437-50; and Prewitt-Díaz, "Factors That Affect the Educational Performance."

[4]José A. Cárdenas, *Education and the Children of Migrant Farmworkers: An Overview* (Cambridge: Harvard University, Center for Law and Education, 1976)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

ances, and basic sanitation facilities.[6] They do not willingly choose to live without such necessities; rather, the substandard living conditions are an all-too-common outgrowth of the piece-rate pay system that dominates migratory work.[7] In addition, these conditions often expose migrant children and their families to toxic pesticides, resulting in higher rates of tuberculosis, pneumonia, asthma, emphysema, and bronchitis.[8] In fact, one study shows the average life expectancy of a migrant worker is 49 years.[9]

Common sense suggests these hardships would have a negative impact on the educational progress of migrant children. To be certain, research demonstrates overwhelmingly that migrant students consistently must adjust to harsh living and working conditions while simultaneously learning, with each move, to navigate new curricula, teachers, friendships, testing practices, credit accrual systems, and state regulations.[10] Given the nature of social and cultural reproduction, the educational prospects for migratory

---

(ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 134 367); David Hinojosa and Louie Miller, "Grade Level Attainment among Migrant Farm Workers in South Texas," *Journal of Educational Research* 77, no. 6 (July-August 1984): 346-50; and Ann Cranston-Gingras and Donna J. Anderson, "Reducing the Migrant Student Dropout Rate: The Role of School Counselors," *School Counselor* 38, no. 2 (November 1990): 95-104.

[5]Gary Huang, *Health Problems among Migrant Farmworkers' Children in the U.S.* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1993) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 357 907).

[6]Nancy Feyl Chavkin, *Family Lives and Parental Involvement in Migrant Students' Education* (ERIC Digest) (Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1991) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 335 174); and Isabel Valle, *Fields of Toil: A Migrant Family's Journey* (Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1994).

[7]Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, *Migrant Farmworkers in the United States: Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Briefings of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe* (Washington, DC: Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1993) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 365 486).

[8]Huang, *Health Problems*.

[9]Gerdean G. Tan, Margaret P. Ray, and Rodney Cate, "Migrant Farm Child Abuse and Neglect within an Ecosystem Framework," *Family Relations* 40, no. 1 (January 1991): 84-90.

[10]Jan Hamilton, "The Gifted Migrant Child: An Introduction," *Roeper Review* 6, no. 3 (February 1984): 146-49; Prewitt-Díaz, Trotter, and Rivera, "Effects of Migration on Children"; and Straits, "Residence."

children do not look very promising.[11] In fact, data demonstrate migrants are less educated than the general workforce, having an average education of less than eight years.[12]

The most reliable and recent national studies of migrant school completion rates (more than a decade old) report that only about half received a high school diploma.[13] In light of this sobering statistic, it would be easy to conclude that the destiny of many migrant youth is to become permanent members of the migrant stream. However, there are success stories in the literature that show the strong mediating role educational institutions can play in the lives of migrant children.[14]

Rather than accepting (and perhaps expecting) low academic performance from Latino students and other students of color, educational institutions need to foster, promote, and demand accountable systems that ensure a proper education for *all* children. This requires adopting policies and practices that call for educational excellence, particularly for the most marginalized and disadvantaged youth.[15]

---

[11]Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Education—Structure and Society: Selected Readings*, comp. B. R. Cosin (New York: Penguin, 1971); Jean Anyon, "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work," *Journal of Education* 162, no. 1 (winter 1980): 67-92; Michael W. Apple, "Reproduction and Contradiction in Education: An Introduction," in *Cultural and Economic Reproduction in Education: Essays on Class, Ideology, and the States*, ed. Michael W. Apple (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982); Stanley Aronowitz and Henry A. Giroux, *Education Still Under Siege*, 2d ed. (Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1993); Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, 1977); and Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (New York: Basic, 1976).

[12]Steve Harrington, "Children of the Road," *Instructor* 97, no. 4 (November-December 1987): 36-39.

[13]State University of New York (SUNY) Oneonta Migrant Programs. *Migrant Attrition Project: Executive Summary*. (Oneonta, NY: MAP Project, 1987); and Vamos, Inc. *National Migrant Student Graduation Rate Formula*. Prepared for Secondary Credit Exchange and Accrual. (Geneseo, NY: BOCES Geneseo Migrant Center)

[14]Flores, *Children of La Frontera*; and Pedro Reyes, Jay D. Scribner, and Lonnie Wagstaff, eds., *A Vision for Tomorrow: Successful Migrant Education Practices, Migrant Education Policy and Practice Research Project, Second Year Report* (Austin: Texas Education Agency, Department of Migrant Education, 1998); Eugene E. García, "Foreword," in *Children of La Frontera*; Flores and Hammer, "Introduction"; and Guerra, "Work Experience."

[15]David Hayes-Bautista, Werner O. Schink, and Jorge Chapa, *The Burden of Support: Young Latinos in an Aging Society* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Promise of Parent Involvement in Improving Minority Student Achievement

In recent years, parent involvement increasingly has been recognized by educators as a positive force in addressing minority student underachievement.[16] Research consistently shows a high correlation between parent involvement and the academic performance of children.[17] Parent involvement is so popular among educators and policymakers that one researcher has referred to it as the "vanguard of educational reform."[18]

Because of its participatory nature, parent involvement is seen not

---

Press, 1988); James Joseph Scheurich, "Highly Successful and Loving, Public Elementary Schools Populated Mainly by Low-SES Children of Color: Core Beliefs and Cultural Characteristics," *Urban Education* 33, no. 4 (November 1998): 451-91; Gary Orfield, "The Growth and Concentration of Hispanic Enrollment and the Future of American Education" (paper presented at the Annual Conference of the National Council of La Raza, Albuquerque, 13 July 1988) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 319 819); Romo and Falbo, *Latino High School Graduation*; and Pedro Reyes, Jay D. Scribner, and Alicia Paredes Scribner, eds., *Creating Learning Communities: Lessons from High Performing Hispanic Schools*, Critical Issues in Educational Leadership Series (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).

[16]Nancy Feyl Chavkin, ed., *Families and Schools in a Pluralistic Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993); and Oliver C. Moles, "Collaboration between Schools and Disadvantaged Parents: Obstacles and Openings," in *Families and Schools*.

[17]Rhoda Becher, *Parents and Schools* (ERIC Digest) (Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1986) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 269 137); Jacqueline S. Eccles and Rena D. Harold, "Family Involvement in Children's and Adolescents' Schooling," in *Family School Links: How Do They Affect Educational Outcomes?* eds. Alan Booth and Judith F. Dunn (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1996); Joyce L. Epstein, "Parents' Reactions to Teacher Practices of Parent Involvement," *Elementary School Journal* 86, no. 3 (January 1986): 277-94; Anne T. Henderson, *The Evidence Continues to Grow: Parent Involvement Improves Student Achievement* (Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1987) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 315 199); Nicholas Hobbs, *Strengthening Families* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984); Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey, Otto C. Bassler, and Rebecca Burow, "Parents' Reported Involvement in Students' Homework: Strategies and Practices," *Elementary School Journal* 95, no. 5 (May 1995): 435-50; David Peterson, *Parent Involvement in the Educational Process* (ERIC Digest) (Eugene, OR: ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 1989) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 312 776); and Carmen Simich-Dudgeon, *Parent Involvement and the Education of Limited-English-Proficient Students* (ERIC Digest) (Washington, DC: ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics, 1986) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 279 205).

[18]Michelle Fine, "[Ap]parent Involvement: Reflections on Parents, Power, and Urban Public Schools," *Teachers College Record* 94, no. 4 (summer 1993): 682.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

only as an effective vehicle for school accountability but also as a powerful tool to promote the academic success of students.[19] For example, research consistently finds that parent participation enhances student self-esteem, improves parent-child relationships, and helps parents develop positive attitudes toward schools.[20] Research also suggests that educators benefit as a result of increased parent involvement: teachers gain confidence in their efficacy to teach children,[21] administrators strengthen community relations as they interact with parents on a more frequent basis,[22] and schools become more collaborative and less hierarchical in nature.[23]

Most importantly, parent involvement has a positive effect on student learning. Children whose parents are involved in their education have better grades, improved test scores, long-term academic success, more positive academic attitudes,[24] higher reading achievement,[25] improved grades through homework assignments,[26] and other indicators of a sound educational foundation.[27] In short, there is general consensus concerning the efficacy of parent involvement as a

---

[19]Becher, *Parents and Schools*; Eccles and Harold, "Family Involvement"; Henderson, *Evidence Continues to Grow*; Anne T. Henderson, Carl L. Marburger, and Theodora Ooms, *Beyond the Bake Sale: An Educator's Guide to Working with Parents* (Columbia, MD: National Committee for Citizens in Education, 1986) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 270 508).

[20]Patricia Clark Brown, *Involving Parents in the Education of Their Children* (ERIC Digest) (Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1989) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 308 988).

[21]Kathleen V. Hoover-Dempsey, Otto C. Bassler, and Jane S. Brissie, "Parent Involvement: Contributions of Teacher Efficacy, School Socioeconomic Status, and Other School Characteristics," *American Educational Research Journal* 24, no. 3 (fall 1987): 417-35.

[22]Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, *Beyond the Bake Sale*.

[23]Mick Coleman, "Planning for the Changing Nature of Family Life in Schools for Young Children," *Young Children* 46, no. 4 (May 1991): 15-21; James P. Comer, "Parent Participation in the Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan* 67, no. 6 (February 1986): 442-46; Mary E. Henry, *Parent-School Collaboration: Feminist Organizational Structures and School Leadership* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996); and Nel Noddings, *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992).

[24]Peterson, *Parent Involvement*.

[25]Simich-Dudgeon, *Parent Involvement*.

[26]Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Burow, "Parents' Reported Involvement"

[27]Brown, *Involving Parents*; Hobbs, *Strengthening Families*.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

transformational tool of school reform and school accountability.[28]

Parent involvement gives historically marginalized communities a voice in school decision-making efforts and a role as collaborators in their children's education.[29] It also is a vehicle for turning schools into true learning organizations that focus on student success for all children, irrespective of cultural backgrounds or migratory status.[30]

However, despite improved efforts to include minority parents in school matters, studies have shown that marginalized parents still are not involved at the same rate as their White nonmigrating counterparts. This problem troubles scholars in the field, who recognize the connection between parent involvement and student achievement.[31]

Moving Beyond Good Intentions: The Need to Identify Best Practices

How can schools involve marginalized parents on a daily basis? Both researchers and practitioners have provided recommendations and guidance to answer that question. Mary Henry, for example, suggests schools look to feminist theory, which moves away from bureaucratic and disconnected understandings of organizational leadership toward a more egalitarian, collaborative, and caring ethos. Henry criticizes the traditional male domination of organizational and leadership roles and contends schools should develop a partnership approach, where respect, shared decision making, and a celebration of diversity are daily parts of school. Henry believes schools must move toward a more democratic vision, with the values and teachings of feminism serving as a vehicle for school reform. Other scholars have provided compelling arguments for egalitarian and caring practices.[32]

---

[28]Becher, *Parents and Schools*; Eccles and Harold, "Family Involvement"; and Henderson, *Evidence Continues to Grow*.

[29]Henry, *Parent-School Collaboration*.

[30]Moles, "Collaboration between Schools."

[31]Chavkin, *Families and Schools*; and Moles, "Collaboration between Schools."

[32]Henry, *Parent-School Collaboration*. See also Catherine Marshall, "School Administrators' Values: A Focus on Atypicals," *Educational Administration Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (August 1992): 368-86; Nel Noddings, *Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984); Noddings, "The Gender Issue," *Educational Leadership* 49, no. 4 (December 1991): 65-70; and Noddings, *Challenge to Care*.

However, much of the advice educators have had to rely on in working with *migrant* parents is based primarily on anecdotal evidence and accounts of schools that have developed creative approaches. Little systematic research has been done to specifically address best practices for involving this particular population of parents.[33] In part because of this lack of research-based knowledge, many parent involvement efforts have limited success. Schools often fail to acknowledge the multiple factors that migrant families face on a daily basis. In short, there is a great need for research that identifies and documents successful approaches to increasing migrant parent involvement in their children's educations.[34] Researchers could begin to develop this knowledge by studying schools that have a proven track record of success.

One such effort was initiated more than three years ago by a cadre of researchers from The University of Texas at Austin with the assistance of the Migrant Office at the Texas Education Agency. This group has launched one of the first comprehensive research projects to focus specifically on best practices for migrants.[35] Early findings of this research indicate that effective migrant parent involvement initiatives are not defined as a set of practices or activities for parents to do (e.g., PTA/PTO, bake sales, parent-teacher conferences). Instead the focus is on ways schools can help migrant parents cope with the problems they face on a daily basis.[36]

---

[33]Gerardo R. López, Jay D. Scribner, and L. Walling, "Creating and Maintaining Effective Parental Involvement Programs for Migrant Populations: A Critical Analysis of Parent Involvement Research" (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, April 1998).

[34]Joseph Prewitt-Diaz, Robert T. Trotter, II, and Vidal A. Rivera, Jr., *Effects of Migration on Children: An Ethnographic Study* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Department of Education, Division of Migrant Education, 1989) (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 327 346).

[35]Although this research project was not the first to identify best parent involvement practices for migrant populations, it was one of the first to research and document such practices in a systematic and comprehensive manner. To be certain, a wealth of important practitioner-based research has been conducted in the migrant parent involvement arena for more than 35 years. Such work should not be minimized or presumed to be less significant than this research project.

[36]Reyes, Scribner, and Wagstaff, *Vision for Tomorrow*. The findings reported herein are based on Gerardo R. López, Jay D. Scribner, and Kanya Mahitivanichcha, "Redefining Parental Involvement: Lessons From High-Performing Migrant-Impacted Schools," *American Educational Research Journal* 38, no. 2 (summer

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

These findings reconceptualize how we have traditionally viewed parent involvement. Instead of requiring parents to come to schools to get involved, the schools in this study perceived themselves as active and proactive agents in reaching out to migrant parents. In other words, the effective schools and districts in this study showed a high degree of "home involvement" and worked very hard to reach out to migrant parents on a daily basis.

The high degree of outreach employed by these schools and districts was a necessary response to the situations faced by the migrant families they served. Many families had little or no food to eat; some lived in their cars or tiny travel trailers; others had no electricity, natural gas, heat, running water, or sewage/septic systems. Their primary concern was basic survival from one day to the next. When parents are living under such harsh conditions, it becomes very difficult for them to think about school involvement in traditional ways. The parent involvement coordinators, migrant personnel, teachers, school staff, and other administrators in these schools and districts fully recognized the necessity of meeting the needs of migrant families as a first step. The researchers found that home visits played a major role in making school personnel aware of the various needs of migrant families. In fact, many schools and districts in the study had an official policy that a teacher or school administrator would visit the home of every student at least once a year.

Migrant families highly valued this type of personal, one-on-one interaction. In the study, school personnel felt they had to get to know families on a more personal, rather than professional, level in order to understand the lived reality of the families with whom they worked. They dedicated a tremendous amount of time to meeting personally with every migrant family, time that was never counted or recognized in any official document.

2001): 253-88. We identified "*exceptional*" as school districts with at least an 80 percent migrant graduation rate, an 80 percent migrant promotion rate, a 94 percent migrant student attendance rate, and a 70 percent passing rate on all areas (e.g., math, reading, and writing) of the state standardized test during the 1995-1996 academic year. The study of four school districts included a total of 17 interviews (12 group interviews, 5 individual interviews) with district-level administrators, school-level administrators, parent involvement coordinators, migrant personnel, school paraprofessionals, and parents themselves. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed according to traditional qualitative guidelines.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The researchers concluded that this level of personal commitment was what made the difference in the studied schools and districts. The schools placed a high priority on helping families and serving parents, as opposed to having the parents serve the schools. Accommodating the needs of migrant families, first and foremost in a respectful and nonjudgmental way, made the families more likely to view schools as true partners in the education process.

Another finding of this research related to the types of parent education programs the schools offered. Traditionally, parent education is viewed as a means to train parents to better intervene in the schooling process. In these schools, however, parent education was seen as a vehicle to broaden parents' cultural capital, enhancing their ability to improve their lives and to gain access to employment options other than migratory work. In essence, parent education was seen as an end in itself and not necessarily as a means toward some other end. This commitment to meet the needs of migrant parents—above any other factor—is what made these schools and districts unique.

In short, the researchers found in these effective schools that the concept of parent involvement was entirely different from traditional approaches. The schools in this study viewed parent involvement as a proactive endeavor. School personnel made an extra effort to visit homes and take the school to the migrant families. The schools also redefined parent education as an end in itself rather than as a system to teach parents about appropriate parenting styles or suitable involvement forms. Underlying this approach was a genuine interest in the well-being of migrant families.

Conclusion

This research points to the fact that migrant parents cannot be involved in traditional ways until their basic needs have been met. As long as parents are worried about their day-to-day survival there is little hope of getting them involved in typical school-based parent activities. The schools in this study were effective because they fully understood that meeting the basic needs of migrant families was first and foremost.

This research also suggests that schools move away from the assumption that involvement consists only of specific activities such as

PTA, school-governance councils, or parent-teacher conferences. This study and others show that minority populations tend not to be involved in these traditional ways. However, if we begin with the premise that involvement results from actions taken by the school, then the question becomes not "How can parents be involved?" but rather "What can *we, as educators, do* to get parents involved?"

The schools in this research project were successful because they asked an entirely different set of questions regarding parent involvement. School personnel took affirmative, proactive steps to address the basic fundamental needs of migrant parents. As a parent involvement coordinator in La Joya, Texas, suggested:

> You have to understand where migrants are coming from: the poverty, not having electricity, no running water, always moving around from place to place—all that stuff. It really makes life difficult for them, you know? . . . So most of the time, migrant parents have to prioritize. . . . [They have] to figure out how they're gonna live, or even where they're gonna live, or how they're gonna put food on the table. You know, basic stuff like that. So if they can't come to the school, then we have to take it upon ourselves to go to them. It's like that saying goes: "If Mohammed doesn't come to the mountain, then the mountain has to go to Mohammed." I really think that's what we're about in this district. Everyday we try to live by that [philosophy]. And I think that's what makes us different than the other school districts out there. Because we really do believe that, and we really do care about these families 110 percent. We really care about these families and we'll go the extra mile, if we have to, in order to do our job. Because our main concern is those parents and those families. We need to make sure they don't fall through the cracks.

Effective parent involvement programs can take root in a school environment that is receptive, welcoming, and nonjudgmental of marginalized parents.[37] Schools can foster such an environment by

[37]Nancy Feyl Chavkin and David L. Williams, "Working Parents and Schools: Implications for Practice," *Education* 111, no. 2 (1990): 242-48; Henry, *Parent-School Collaboration.*

engaging in home involvement and by removing logistical barriers that often inhibit many disadvantaged parents from attending school functions.[38] For example, barriers can be overcome by providing parents with transportation, child-care services, bilingual interpreters, and campus security. However, not all barriers are logistical—some barriers are social. School professionals must develop a vision for change, including an organizational approach that is less hierarchical and more collaborative, with active encouragement for minority parents' participation.[39] In other words, a successful recipe for involvement engenders two-way communication and a democratic partnership approach, including ongoing cooperation, collaboration, trust, learning, and professional development for everyone.[40]

This expanded definition of involvement has obvious implications for both policy and practice—especially for schools impacted by migrant students. It is time for us to "bring the mountain to Mohammed" and begin the process of making a real difference in the educational lives of migrant families.

[38]Henderson, Marburger, and Ooms, *Beyond the Bake Sale*.

[39]Concha Delgado-Gaitán, "Involving Parents in the Schools: A Process of Empowerment," *American Journal of Education* 100, no. 1 (November 1991): 20-46; Margaret Finders and Cynthia Lewis, "Why Some Parents Don't Come to School," *Educational Leadership* 51, no. 8 (May 1994): 50-54.

[40]Finders and Lewis, "Why Some Parents"; David L. Williams, Jr., and Nancy Feyl Chavkin, "Essential Elements of Strong Parent Involvement Programs," *Educational Leadership* 47, no. 2 (October 1989): 18-20; and Susan McAllister Swap, *Developing Home-School Partnerships: From Concepts to Practice* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[X] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[ ] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").